United Nations

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

◆ Five permanent members of Security Council pledge strong support for establishment of weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in Middle East at meeting in Paris.

◆ France and Britain agree to assist International Atomic Energy Agency in recovery and removal of nuclear materials in Iraq.

◆ Human Rights Committee meeting in Geneva adopts list of special issues connected with impact of events since 2 August 1990 to be answered by Iraq.

◆ Experts on Human Rights Committee express concern about human rights situation in the Sudan.

◆ European Community proposes strengthening of United Nations capacity to respond to emergency situations in light of recent catastrophes.

◆ Jordan requests addition of item on prevention of environmental warfare to upcoming General Assembly agenda.

◆ Security Council approves recommendations of Secretary-General on composition of military unit of United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

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The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council have ended a two-day meeting in Paris with a pledge of strong support for the establishment of a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East.

According to an official joint communique issued following the Paris meeting which was transmitted to the United Nations through the United States Mission, the representatives of the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union expressed the view that steps towards that goal should include the full implementation of the Security Council's cease-fire resolution 687 on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait.

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The five countries noted with concern the dangers associated with the excessive build-up of military capabilities in the Middle East, and confirmed they would not transfer conventional weapons "in circumstances which would undermine stability". They also referred to threats to peace and stability posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons, chemical and biological weapons and missiles, and pledged to seek effective measures of non-proliferation and arms control "in a fair, reasonable, comprehensive and balanced manner on a global as well as on a regional basis".

They further stressed the need for the adoption by all countries in the region of a comprehensive programme of arms control, including a freeze and ultimate elimination of ground-to-ground missiles; submission of all nuclear activities to International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards; a ban on the importation of nuclear-weapons-usable materials; and agreements by all States in the region to become parties to the convention on chemical weapons as soon as it is concluded in 1992.

The five nations expressed the intention to observe "rules of restraint" regarding conventional weapons transfers and to develop specific guidelines on that basis. Given the "special situation of the Middle East as a primary area of tension", the five said they would develop modalities of consultation and of information exchanges concerning arms transfers to the Middle East, as a matter of priority.

They said a group of experts would meet in September with a view to reaching agreement on that approach and another plenary meeting would be held in October in London. In addition, further meetings would be held periodically to review the issues. The five permanent members of the Security Council expressed the conviction that that process of continuing cooperation would "contribute to a world-wide climate of vigilance in this field which other countries will share".

They also agreed to support continued work in the United Nations on an arms transfers register to be established under the aegis of the Secretary-General, on a non-discriminatory basis, as a step towards increased transparency on arms transfers and in general in military matters.

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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced today that France and the United Kingdom have agreed to undertake operations necessary to recover and render harmless the nuclear fuel elements present in Iraq in fulfilment of Security Council resolution 687. The work will be shared equally between them.

The recovered materials will be subject to IAEA safeguards. The announcement follows a request by IAEA for assistance in the matter from Member States possessing appropriate capabilities.

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The United Nations Human Rights Committee, now meeting in Geneva, has begun its consideration of the third periodic report of Iraq and has decided to focus on the special issues connected with the impact of events since 2 August 1990, in particular, the exercise of the rights guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Today the Commission approved a list of issues to be considered during the session, including the right to self-determination of the Iraqi Kurds; the status of rights during states of emergency as established under the Covenant; and application of the death penalty.

The Committee has also decided to request details about redress for casualties and disappearances in Kuwait, as well as for damage to the right to life resulting from the destruction of oil wells in that country.

The Committee also emphasized questions concerning the fate of Kuwaitis taken to Iraq as prisoners after 2 August 1990, and the rights of persons belonging to minority groups.

The list of approved issues will be submitted to Iraq, which is expected to furnish a reply to the Committee by 18 or 19 July.

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Experts on Human Rights Committee have expressed concern about the human rights situation in the Sudan. Upon hearing the report submitted by the Government of the Sudan, Committee members cited the application of cruel and inhuman punishment and numerous death penalties, as well as serious restrictions on freedom of religion and expression as serious human rights violations that have raised great cause for concern.

In introducing the report, Abdel Samie Omer of the Sudan said the present Government had not yet completed the draft of a permanent federal constitution and that the Sudan continued to be governed by constitutional decrees. According to the report, the Sudan's transitional constitution of 1985 had been suspended on 30 June 1989, when Revolution for National Salvation took power. He also told the Committee that the Government had released all political detainees, totalling some 299, on 29 April.

The Committee expressed concern about inconsistencies between the constitutional decrees and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the introduction of a participatory democracy without political parties. Most Committee experts said the report was inadequate and requested more information.

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Recent catastrophes such as the cyclone in Bangladesh, the crisis in the Horn of Africa, and the massive exodus of Iraqi refugees have led the European Council to propose that the United Nations strengthen its capacity to respond to emergency situations.

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The proposal came in the form of a declaration which was transmitted to the Secretary-General in a letter dated 1 July from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands, Jan De Marchant et d'Ansembourg.

In the declaration, the European Council recommended the appointment of a "high-level coordinator for emergency assistance" to be based in Geneva. The coordinator would set up and maintain the financial and political links needed "to ensure that aid missions proceed smoothly".

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Jordan has requested the addition of an item on the prevention of environmental warfare to the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September.

"Exploitation of the environment as a weapon in times of armed conflict and the taking of practical measures to prevent such exploitation" is the topic proposed by the Jordanian Government in a letter to the Secretary-General signed by the Chargé d'affaires of Jordan's Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

The letter said that "it is common knowledge that the recent military conflict in the Gulf had an impact of tragic proportions on both the people of the region and the environment", adding that scientists have calculated that "it will take decades to recover from the environmental damage resulting from the confrontation."

The letter proposed that the General Assembly establish a committee to study the problems caused by such conflicts and put forward proposals for an efficient mechanism to combat the exploitation of the environment in times of war. Such action might lead to the drafting of a new treaty which would give humanity the confidence to face a more peaceful future, the letter said.

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The Security Council has approved a proposal from Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar on the composition of the military unit of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

After having completed consultations with the parties, the Secretary-General recommended that 36 countries, representing virtually every region of the world, contribute contingents. He said the countries had unofficially indicated they were prepared to contribute contingents to MINURSO's military unit, in some cases subject to confirmation, if officially requested to do so.

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